Maryland Energy ADMINISTRATION

Powering Maryland's Future

Media Contact:
Tamara Toles-O'Laughlin
Office: (410) 260-2609
Cell: (443) 306-8149

Martin O'Malley
Governor
Abigail Ross Hopper, Esq.
Director

60 West Street, Suite 300
Annapolis, MD 21401
1-800-72-ENERGY
energy.maryland.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCIES ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP TO TRACK AND PROTECT MARINE MAMMALS IN OFFSHORE WIND AREA

$2.2M agreement will support deployment of passive acoustic monitoring system for endangered whales and other marine mammals.

ANNAPOLIS, MD (July 10, 2014) — With funding from the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) Offshore Wind Development Fund, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has secured a $1.1M commitment from the U.S. Dept. of Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to gather scientific information about the bionetwork of the Maryland Offshore Wind Energy Area. This effort is intended to protect the ecosystem while providing opportunities for deployment of advanced renewable energy technology within the state.

"The partnership between BOEM and Maryland is a great example of government agencies working together efficiently and effectively for a common purpose," said Maureen Bornholdt, program manager for BOEM's Offshore Renewable Energy Programs. "Data obtained from this partnership will assist both the federal government and the state in making sound decisions for responsible offshore renewable energy development."

The interagency agreement establishes a jointly-funded project to study marine mammal populations off the coast of Maryland to help those agencies and the public better understand the geographic distribution, abundance, and densities of large whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

"The Atlantic Ocean supports a wide variety of marine mammals, some of which are endangered," said DNR Secretary Joe Gill. "This Agreement will help us better understand migratory pathways to protect these critical species as Maryland pursues the development of offshore renewable energy."

MEA and DNR have partnered on several survey efforts, using marine and aerial surveys, to assess the geographic distribution of marine mammals, as well as birds, sea turtles and other ecological resources. Additional efforts are underway to study potential impacts on bats, fish and benthic habitat. Information gathered by this effort will ensure that offshore wind energy projects in this area are better able to anticipate effects to better protect these species, including the endangered North Atlantic right whale. MEA Director Abigail Hopper commented on the agreement, noting that "in all of our offshore wind planning, we are working carefully to ensure that we understand, and can mitigate, any potential project development impacts in the marine environment."

This research project, led by a University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science team, complements previous survey efforts utilizing longer-term deployment of Marine Autonomous Recording Units. These units were designed by Cornell University Bioacoustics Research Program and feature underwater microphones are attached to bottom-moored buoys which will allow them to continuously record ocean sounds produced by large whales and other marine mammals.

"Determining patterns of marine mammal occurrence is a critical first step in to determining any potential effects that offshore wind energy development might have on the behavior and ecology of resident or migratory species," said the study's lead scientist Dr. Helen Bailey. The study will collect two-years of baseline data that can be used for informing siting, mitigation measures, assessing environmental impacts for future wind energy developments, and to facilitate ocean planning in the area.

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The mission of the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) is to promote affordable, reliable, clean energy. MEA's programs and policies help lower energy bills, fuel the creation of green collar jobs, address environmental and climate impacts, and promote energy independence.